

# PASSING OF THE PASSENGER PIGEON

By  
EDWARD B. CLARK  
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**P**RESUMABLY everybody knows by this time that there is a standing offer of \$400 in cash for the man, woman, boy or girl who finds the nest of a wild pigeon (ectopistes migratorius), otherwise known as the passenger pigeon, and finds with it the nestling birds. In order to get the reward the person who makes the discovery must leave the nest and the birds unmolested and prove the truth of it by making a report and giving the scientists an opportunity to verify the case.

Magazine and newspaper articles literally by the thousands have been written about the disappearance of the wild pigeons which once, as it is always put, "darkened the sun with their flights." The members of the biological survey in Washington are specially interested in the subject of the disappearance of this bird of passage from its wild haunts. For years it has been hoped that nesting pairs might be found in some part of the country and that with proper protection the bird might be restored in part at least to its place in nature.

Recently there was a story published to the effect that the birds, wearied of the constant persecution which met them in the United States, had changed the course of their flight and had gone into Mexico and there were living peacefully and happily. This story proved to be absolutely without foundation. Still another tale was to the effect that the pigeons had gone into the heart of South America and there finding conditions pleasant were leading a non-migratory life. This tale also proved to be entirely fictitious.

In all parts of the southern states in the winter seasons there are people watching sharp-eyed for a glimpse of the bird that once was a common sight. In the summer sharp eyes of the north are constantly on the alert for the same purpose, but as yet no authentic report has been received that the bird of mysterious disappearance has revisited the scenes familiar through the centuries to its ancestors.

One of the scientists most interested in the search for the wild pigeon is Ruthven Deane, fellow of the American Ornithologists' union and president of the Illinois Audubon Society for the Protection of Wild Birds. Mr. Deane virtually has given up all hope that any living specimen of the passenger pigeon ever will be found, but he is as tireless today as ever in tracing reports of the bird's reappearance to their sources. The offer of \$400 for the discovery of a nesting pair of the pigeons and their undisturbed nest comes from Clifton R. Hodge of Clark university, but \$100 additional will be paid for the discovery of a pair of birds and their nest if found in the state of Illinois. The additional reward is the joint offer of Mr. Deane and, as I remember it, of Professor Whitman of the University of Chicago.

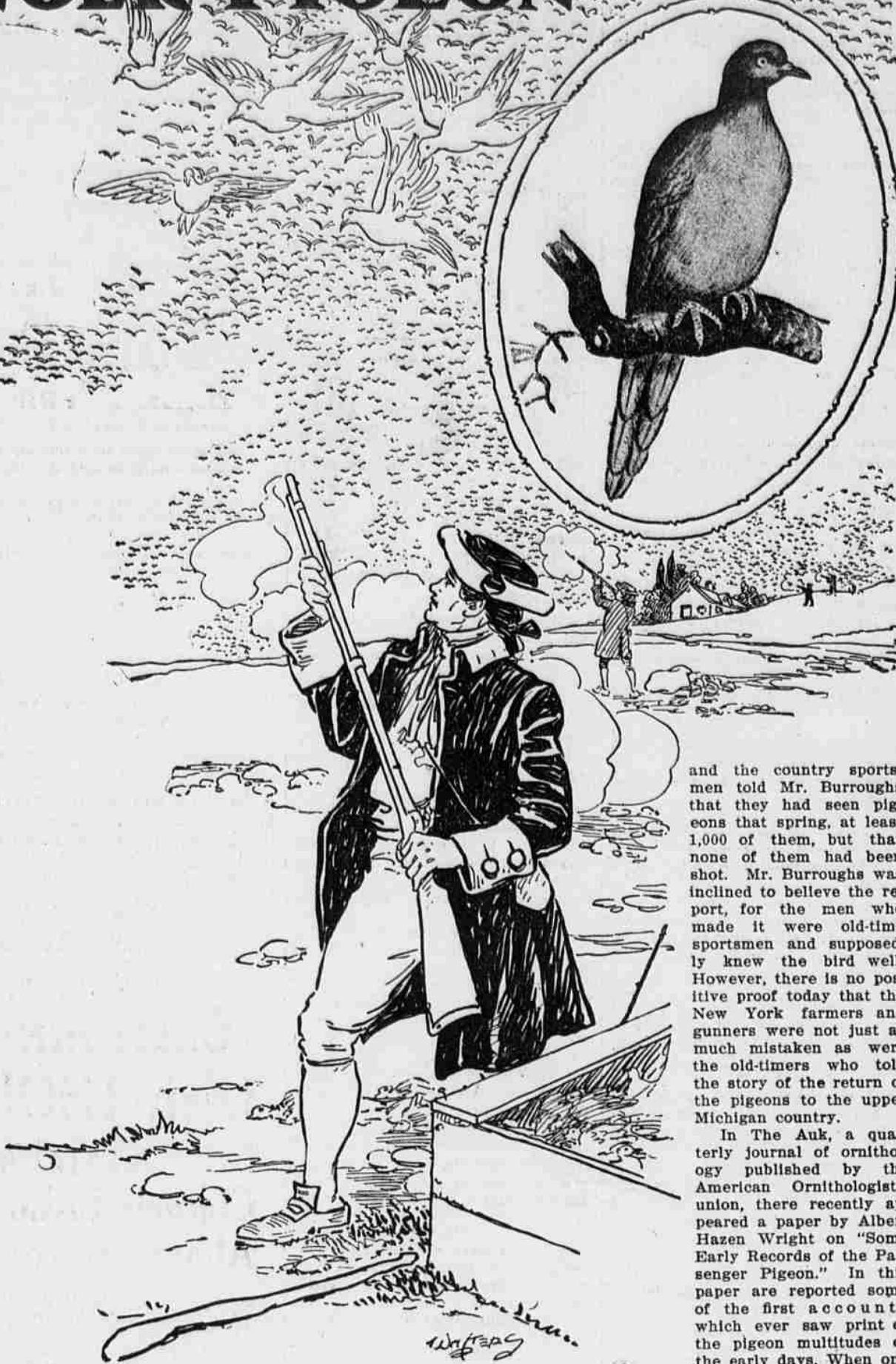
One of the most curious features of the search for the wild pigeon is the mistakes which are made constantly by men who years ago trapped the pigeons and were as familiar with their appearance as they were, and are today for that matter, with the appearance of the common robin of the dooryard. Reports have come in from all sections of the country of the reappearance of the pigeon, but on investigation it invariably has been found that the discoverers had seen nothing more nor less than the common wild dove (venadura macroura), or mourning dove, which is so familiar a bird that it seems almost impossible that any man of the countryside could have failed to overlook it as his constant neighbor and could confuse it with its much larger cousin, the passenger pigeon of other days.

To give an example of how the search is conducted for the wild pigeon and how conscientious are the scientists in attempting to verify reports of its reappearance this one instance, taken from a hundred instances, may be noted. Recently a report from northern Michigan reached the president of the Illinois Audubon society that the passenger pigeon in very truth had reappeared in the vicinity of a club house frequented by fishermen and gunners, many of whom had known the pigeon well in the old days and who were certain that in this case they could not be mistaken as to the identity of the bird visitors.

It was a long journey to the northern Michigan club house, but an ornithologist undertook the trip believing in his heart that finally the passenger pigeon had been found, for he knew that the men who had made the report had been familiar with the bird in the old days and supposedly knew the appearance of its every feather. At the end of the journey he was told that the pigeons were there and he was led out to see them. They proved to be mourning doves, a bird common in nearly all parts of Michigan and in most of the states of the Union. The disappointment was keen, and keener in this case because this was one report which seemed to have about it every mark of truth.

When I was a boy I knew the wild pigeon fairly well. It was nothing like as abundant as it had been in the years gone by, but occasionally small flocks were seen in the vicinity of my birthplace in the foothills of the Adirondack mountains in central New York. I am sorry to say that I shot some of the birds before I fully realized the value of giving protection to a vanishing race. The mourning dove I know as well as I know the English sparrow, and I think that there is no chance of confusion in my mind respecting the identity of the dove and its bigger relative, the pigeon. It is possible, though I am not sure that such is a fact, that I saw the last wild pigeon reported in Illinois. Others may have been seen since that time within the borders of the state, but if so I have not seen their appearance reported.

At five o'clock on the morning of a late April day, fifteen years ago, I went into Lincoln park,



Chicago, to look for migrating birds which had dropped down into the pleasure ground from their night flight in order to rest and feed. I had just entered the park when my attention was attracted to a large bird perched on the limb of a maple tree and facing the sun, which was just rising out of Lake Michigan. My heart gave a sort of leap, for I recognized it instantly as the passenger pigeon, a bird of which I had not seen a living specimen for at least twelve years.

Then instantly I began to doubt and thought that my eyes must be mistaken and that the atmosphere was magnifying the bird and that what was before me was really a mourning dove. I drew closer and then I knew there was no possibility of deception. Before me was a beautiful specimen of the male passenger pigeon with the sun striking full on the burnished feathers of his throat. I stood within 15 yards of the bird for fully half an hour and then it left the maple and went in arrowy flight down the lake shore drive toward the heart of the city. I have often wondered since what was its fate.

Theodore Roosevelt is deeply interested in the outcome of the search for surviving members, if such there may be, of the passenger pigeon tribe. Mr. Roosevelt knew the bird when he was a boy and in his trips afield he always has kept a watchful eye open for a possible sight of a specimen of the species now feared to be extinct. When Mr. Roosevelt was president of the United States he occasionally went to a wild spot in Virginia where he owned a cabin. He called the place Pine Knot. While there one day he saw what he believed to be nine wild pigeons. It would be perfectly proper today for a man who saw as many pigeons as this together to shoot one of them—one only—in order to prove beyond peradventure that the tribe still has existence. When one simply reports the appearance of a pigeon or of a flock of pigeons every one doubts very naturally the truth of the tale, holding that the mourning dove has been again mistaken for its cousin bird.

President Roosevelt did not have a gun with him on the occasion of his meeting with what he thought were wild pigeons. If he had he probably would have shot one of them. He told no one except a few scientists and a few friends of his discovery. He knew as well as anyone else did that in the absence of the proof furnished by a bird in the flesh it would be said at once that he made the common error. No one knows positively today whether the nine birds which the president saw were or were not passenger pigeons. Every time that Mr. Roosevelt has been to Pine Knot since he has hoped for another sight of the birds which made him glad some years ago.

John Burroughs heard from his friend, Theodore Roosevelt, that the nine pigeons had been seen in Virginia. Burroughs believed the story because he knew how accurate an observer of nature his friend the president was and is. The stories of the pigeons in Virginia led Mr. Burroughs to make inquiries at once in the counties in New York state west of the lower Hudson lying in the old line of flight of the migrating pigeon armies of years ago. There the farmers

and the country sportsmen told Mr. Burroughs that they had seen pigeons that spring, at least 1,000 of them, but that none of them had been shot. Mr. Burroughs was inclined to believe the report, for the men who made it were old-time sportsmen and supposedly knew the bird well. However, there is no positive proof today that the New York farmers and gunners were not just as much mistaken as were the old-timers who told the story of the return of the pigeons to the upper Michigan country.

In The Auk, a quarterly journal of ornithology published by the American Ornithologists' union, there recently appeared a paper by Albert Hazen Wright on "Some Early Records of the Passenger Pigeon." In this paper are reported some of the first accounts which ever saw print of the pigeon multitudes of the early days. When one reads them it seems almost incredible that a bird species which numbered its individuals almost, it would appear, by the million millions could ever disappear from the face of the earth.

The account of the great pigeon flocks which is most familiar to the people of the country is that written by John James Audubon, the naturalist. It seems from Mr. Wright's paper, however, that a century and a half before Audubon was born records were made of the immense numbers of the birds which were seen in America. The earliest writers called them turtle doves. Mr. Wright quotes from the Jesuit father, Le Jeune, who in the year 1637 likened the American Indians to the pigeons. "Our savages are always savage; they resemble the migratory birds of their own country. In one season turtle doves are sometimes found in such abundance that the end of their army cannot be seen when they are flying in a body."

Mr. Wright found another reference to the immense numbers of the pigeons in the writings of another Jesuit father in the year 1671. The observation was made at Cayuga lake in New York state. "Four leagues from here I saw by the side of a river within a very limited space eight or nine extremely fine salt springs. Many snares are set there for catching pigeons, from seven to eight hundred being often taken at once." Another father of the church in the latter part of the seventeenth century writes of the passenger pigeons of the St. Lawrence country: "Among the birds of every variety to be found here it is to be noted that pigeons abound in such numbers that this year one man killed 132 at a single shot."

Within the last five or six years reports have come of the reappearance of the pigeon in Missouri, Oklahoma, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Virginia and perhaps from some other states. In no instance has proof been adduced that the real passenger pigeon, the bird of the old time, was the species seen. The disappearance of the flocks which once covered the sky as with a cloud is one of the mysteries of nature. Man's persecution of course had much, if not everything, to do with the annihilation of the species, but it would seem that something else, disease perhaps, must be held accountable at least in part for the dying out of a noble race of feathered game.

## He Was Too Wise

Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, the government's food expert, said at a recent dinner in Washington: "But in our search for pure foods we may go too far. Thus a lady entered a grocer's the other day and said:

"Have you got any currants?"  
The clerk, a college graduate, replied:  
"Yes, madam, we have very fine Corinthos, or small dried grapes from the Greek town of that name—currants, you know, is the corrupted form. How many will you have?"  
"None at all if they are corrupted," muttered the lady. "I belong to a pure food league."

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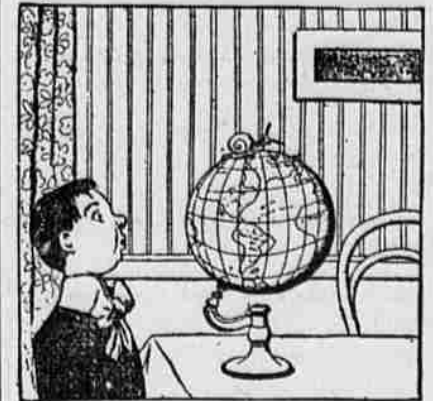


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## Doubting His Word.

Two Irishmen occupied beds in the same room. By and by one of them woke up.

"Mike," said he, "did you put out the cat?"

"I did," said Mike.

An hour later Patrick woke up again.

"Mike," said he, "Mike, did you put out the cat?"

"Sure I did," said Mike, sleepily. "On me word of honor."

Some time later Patrick again waked up.

"Mike," said he, "Mike, ye divvie; ye did not put out the cat."

"Well," said Mike angrily, "if ye will not take the word of honor of a gentleman get up and put her out yerself."

## Encourage the Boys.

When a boy presents an idea that is feasible, pat him on the back and encourage him, and he will develop a love for agriculture and become the pride of your heart in your declining years and will love the homes and the farms that you have worked so hard to pay for.

If farming has not paid in your case by all means give the boy a chance to begin without your handicap. "What was good enough for me is good enough for the boy," is a maxim unworthy of a New England farmer. Give the boy a chance at an agricultural education and he will help you to stop the leaks and turn the past and present into a brighter future.

## A FOOD STORY

Makes a Woman of 70 "One in 10,000."

The widow of one of Ohio's most distinguished newspaper editors and a famous leader in politics in his day, says she is 70 years old and a "stronger woman than you will find in ten thousand," and she credits her fine physical condition to the use of Grape-Nuts.

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"It was not until I began to use Grape-Nuts food three years ago that I found relief. It has proved, with the dear Lord's blessing, a great boon to me. It brought me health and vigor such as I never expected to again enjoy, and in gratitude I never fail to sound its praises." Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich.

"There's a Reason."

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They do their duty.

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They mend all leaks in all vitals—bile, brain, copper, granite, hot water bags, etc. No solder, cement or rivet. Any one can use them! Fix any surface; two million in use. Send for sample pkg. 10c. Agents wanted. J. L. Gledhill, E. Aurora, N. Y.

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